



PROFILE



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Los Angeles Times

Oct. 29, 2015



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From brush to balance sheet

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BY KATHLEEN IUTPPI

February 20, 2015, 8:19 p.m.

The art instructor walked around an extended glass top table and instructed the young artists to pick up their paintbrushes and blend ink colors onto drawing paper.

"Get those ink colors flowing," she said.

Bright oranges and pinks were swirled together, while others mixed blues and greens.

Noticably absent on the table were erasers.

"Remember, we like mistakes," she said to the students.

That mindset at Open House Creative — committing to the drawing, giving into the process and not worrying about the details — is being taught to students at an early age.

The art gallery and classroom, which has been open for six months in an industrial complex in Westside Costa Mesa, is where children on a Wednesday afternoon were thinking about their upcoming art show by practicing paintbrush strokes and mixing liquid colors.

The 16 enrolled students, ranging from ages 4 to 12, were in the midst of their last "Mini Curator Class," preparing for their first curated evening show on Friday.

The class was designed to teach the art of producing and showcasing art. Children were taught a variety of mediums, including printmaking, drawing and painting and mixed media. The founders of Open House Creative, including Sophie St-Onge, Kameron Campbell and Michele Lujan, wanted the participants to get a glimpse inside the art gallery world at a young age.

Campbell, the center's art program director, came up with the idea of a mini-exhibit hosted by kids so that each student could discover how to curate his or her own art show by learning about production, layout, pricing and choosing a cause to support. Their toolbox was crammed with pens, ink, charcoals and other instruments.

"It's great for kids to experience their own show," said Lujan, the studio director. "They will create their own pieces, learn how to curate a show and price their artwork."

The art studio's staff assisted the children with various skill levels having the team of students collaborate on projects. Younger ones practiced brushstrokes to the shared canvases where older children added advanced details.

The artwork will be sold auction-style, and all proceeds will support Orangewood Children's Foundation, a



SCOTT SANCHEZ/REDUX PHOTO

Olivia Sullivan, 5, left, Bella Cardal, 5, and Sasha Quigley, 7, work on art projects at the Open House Creative on Feb. 11.

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facility for Orange County children who are victims of abuse, neglect and abandonment.

It was an organization, Lujan said, the children chose from a list of nonprofits because it helped other kids.

The workshop, which Lujan said is rooted in inventive thinking, also included mini blind drawings. The children were instructed to turn to the classmate next to them, hold a paintbrush in their hand and close their eyes as the partner guided the person's hand to draw whatever came to their imagination.

"It feels like you're drawing a big blob," said 7-year-old Ava Campbell.

"It's a boulder creature," said her 4-year-old co-artist, Lennox Quigley. "Open your eyes."

"Ahhhhhh!"

The result, perhaps classified as an abstract, was a black circle surrounded by lines.

Other groups were taught how to make a color's shade gradually turn lighter or darker, while other students drew faces or birds.

Lujan brought students over to the gallery's section of completed works so that each one could provide a title for his or her piece.

"Look at your picture and think of something for a title," Lujan said when she selected the child's individual work.

"Swiller," one said aloud.

"Love," another responded.

Others were too bashful to share and opted to whisper into Lujan's ear.

And to price their work, some came up with numbers in their head while others considered the piece's worth by thinking of the skills they learned to complete it.

During the six-week program, each student made three individual pieces and collaborated on six team projects.

Along with teaching children how to use creative problem-solving skills, Open House Creative has designed workshops and products for adults. Novices or experienced artists can come to the space and learn the fundamentals of color theory or Neo-pop Realism.

Among the classes is a six-week portrait series designed for those interested in learning how to draw themselves or their favorite person. There's also a family marbling workshop designed for a small group to use inks and paints to create marbling blocks for wrapping paper, note cards or art prints.

It's a place, Lujan said, that came into fruition after the friends and co-founders wanted a space where creative minds could meet and delve into design, photography and printmaking. The children's program, she said, is already in the works to run again in the coming months.

"At the show, a lot of people will see your work," Campbell said as she stood before a table with charcoal pencils strewn across pads of paper. "Who is excited?"

All 16 hands soared into the air.

If You Go

What: "The Mini Curators"

When: 6 to 9 p.m. Friday

Where: Open House Creative, 1602 Babcock St., Costa Mesa

Information: (949) 438-5674 or openhouse-creative.com

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